

**NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE
CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD**

**FIREBREAK
(Feet)**

CODE 394

DEFINITION

A strip of bare land or vegetation that retards fire.

PURPOSES

- To prevent the spread of wildfire.
- To control prescribed burns.

CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES

All land uses where protection from wildfire is needed or prescribed burning is applied.

CRITERIA

General Criteria Applicable To All Purposes

Firebreaks may be temporary or permanent and shall consist of fire-resistant vegetation, non-flammable materials, bare ground, or a combination of these.

Firebreaks will be of sufficient width and length to contain the expected fire.

Firebreaks shall be located to minimize risk to the resources being protected, including locating on the contour where practicable to minimize risk of soil erosion.

Plant species selected for vegetated firebreaks will be noninvasive, comprised of attributes making them capable of retarding fire, and easy to maintain.

Erosion control measures shall prevent sediment from leaving the site.

Comply with applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations, during the installation, operation and maintenance of this practice.

CONSIDERATIONS

Use barriers such as streams, lakes, ponds, rock cliffs, roads, field borders, skidtrails, landings, drainage canals, railroads, utility right-of-ways, cultivated land, or other areas as existing firebreaks.

Attempt to locate firebreaks near ridge crests and valley bottoms. If winds are predictable, firebreaks should be located perpendicular to the wind and on the windward side of the area to be protected.

Consider the selection of plant species that will enhance the needs of wildlife in the area.

Wildlife values can be improved by clearing strips 20 to 30 feet wide on both sides of the firebreak. See Field Border - Code 386.

Design and layout should include multiple uses.

Consider cultural resources and environmental concerns such as threatened and endangered species of plants and animals, natural areas, and wetlands.

PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

Following are the minimum construction specifications for permanent woodland firebreaks:

Keep grades below 15 percent wherever possible and build with a width of 8 feet if designed for vehicles; 4-6 feet if designed for foot traffic. Provide water control and water quality safeguards. See Forest Trails and Landings - Code 655 for additional information on the construction of woods roads.

Temporary firebreaks should be built during wildfire control efforts. Location, pattern, and frequency need to be determined on site taking into consideration present and anticipated fire conditions. West Virginia Division of Forestry personnel are responsible for directing wildfire control efforts in West Virginia.

Minimum specifications include clearing a lane at least six feet wide with a 2-footwide pathway in the middle cleared of all inflammable material down to mineral soil. Firebreaks should angle outward from the top of the hill to the bottom to avoid burning debris rolling across the cleared line into unburned areas. Placement should take into consideration potential snags which may fall across the firebreak.

Permanent firebreaks in open land or plantations are single purpose lanes and should be constructed and maintained as follows:

Disk or plow strips at least 12 feet wide.

On lands with slopes greater than 5 percent locate firebreaks approximately on the contour.

Locate firebreaks along public roads and at intervals throughout the plantation. Frequency of firebreaks throughout the plantation will depend upon the value of the crop, degree of hazard, and size, shape and

orientation / location of the plantation.

After initial establishment by plowing or disking, disk annually before fall statutory fire season (October 1- December 31) to control vegetation on the firebreak and to expose at least 50 percent mineral soil.

Tall fescue or crownvetch are suitable for maintaining cover on field firebreaks where erosion control is necessary and where the areas will be disked annually in late summer. Note that adjacent landuses and vegetation should be considered when using tall fescue.

Specifications for applying this practice shall be prepared for each site and recorded using approved specification sheets, job sheets, technical notes, and narrative statements in the conservation plan and the burn plan, or other acceptable documentation.

At a minimum the following will be identified in the conservation plan:

Type of firebreak

*(Temporary vs. Permanent,
Woodland vs. Open Land)*

Field location / plan view

Length of firebreak (ft.)

Average width of firebreak (ft.)

Operation and maintenance plan

OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

Mow or graze vegetative firebreaks to avoid a build-up of excess litter and to control weeds.

Where practical, management activities will be performed outside the primary nesting season (March 15 - July 15).

Inspect all firebreaks annually prior to statutory fire seasons (October 1 - December 31 and March 1 - May 31) for woody materials such as dead limbs or

blown down trees and remove them from the firebreak.

Inspect firebreaks annually and rework bare ground firebreaks as necessary to keep them clear of flammable vegetation.

Repair erosion control measures as necessary to ensure proper function.

Access by vehicles or people will be controlled to prevent damage to the firebreak.

Bare ground firebreaks, which are no longer needed, will be stabilized.